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**Multilingualism**

# Multilingualism

## Report of the Secretary-General

*Summary*

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 69/324, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it, at its seventy-first session, a comprehensive report on the full implementation of its resolutions on multilingualism. The report provides an update on the implementation structures put in place by the Coordinator for Multilingualism, including initial steps taken towards the formulation of a strategic policy framework, and the various initiatives undertaken since the submission of the previous report on this subject (A/69/282) in 2014 aimed at mainstreaming multilingualism as a core value of the Organization into the activities of all entities of the Secretariat. Recommendations for the attention of the Assembly are presented in bold.

Submitted for consideration in the report are detailed terms of reference for the Coordinator for Multilingualism containing key responsibilities, working modalities, tasks, priorities, a programme of work, reporting lines and anticipated support, in compliance with the relevant provisions of previous General Assembly resolutions, including resolution 70/9.

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# I. Introduction

1. The present report provides a summary of the actions taken from September 2015 to December 2016 to integrate multilingualism into the activities of the Secretariat, from within existing resources and on an equitable basis. It presents actions taken by the Coordinator for Multilingualism to support the active involvement and commitment of all stakeholders, including all United Nations duty stations and offices away from Headquarters, in effectively and consistently implementing the relevant resolutions throughout the Secretariat. A list of mandates relating to multilingualism is provided in annex I.

2. The present report was prepared with input from and/or in consultation with all Secretariat entities.

# II. Coordination of multilingualism

## A. Appointment and role of the Coordinator for Multilingualism

3. In its resolution 54/64, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to appoint a senior Secretariat official as coordinator of questions relating to multilingualism throughout the Secretariat.

4. In response to the request of the General Assembly contained in its resolution 69/250, on 30 June 2015, the Secretary-General appointed the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management as Coordinator for Multilingualism. The current Under-Secretary-General was designated as Coordinator by the Secretary-General on 11 December 2015.

5. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 70/9, detailed terms of reference for the Coordinator are proposed for consideration in annex II.

6. The Secretary-General believes that the Coordinator will act as the entry point for concerns and queries from Member States and Secretariat entities, serve as a facilitator to attain a coordinated, consistent and coherent approach to multilingualism in the Secretariat and inspire all departments and offices by initiating and proposing innovative solutions to foster an organizational culture conducive to multilingualism.

7. While multilingualism has inherent benefits, the General Assembly has also consistently underlined the importance of multilingualism in achieving the goals of the United Nations, as set out in Article 1 of the Charter of the United Nations, and its contribution to the three pillars of the Organization through its impact on promoting international peace and security, development and human rights. The Assembly has further recognized that multilingualism promotes unity in diversity and international understanding. By fostering tolerance, multilingualism is seen an as enabler of reaching the first aspiration of the founders of the Organization, namely, to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. While multilingualism is regarded as a condition of the effective fulfilment of the mandates of the Secretariat, it is also a foundation for ensuring the ownership and sustainability of the actions of the United Nations among the peoples whom it is called to serve. Along these lines, the Assembly has consistently affirmed the

responsibility of the Secretariat to mainstream multilingualism into its work, including all its information and communications activities. The recognition by the Assembly that multilingualism is a core value of the Organization is a clear demonstration of the importance that Member States attach to this shared principle.

8. Mainstreaming multilingualism implies integrating linguistic factors into every process of the Organization, including decision-making, policy formulation, the development of strategic frameworks and budget outlines, programme implementation, knowledge management and reporting. Integrating multilingualism into the activities of the Secretariat will result in making conscious and deliberate, not default, language choices, on the basis of an analysis of the applicable mandates, client needs and the resources available.

## B. Coordination within the Secretariat

### Engagement of the network of focal points

9. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 69/324, in which the Assembly called upon the Secretary-General to continue to develop the network of focal points supporting the Coordinator, the Coordinator invited all heads of departments and offices, including regional commissions and offices away from Headquarters, to designate a staff member to serve as a focal point. As of December 2016, most had designated one or more focal points.

10. A matrix of the relevant mandates was circulated to all departments and offices to raise awareness of the importance attached by Member States to multilingualism as a core value of the Organization. The role of the Coordinator was explained to the focal points, as well as their own responsibilities.[1]

11. The Coordinator will continue to meet the network of focal points on a regular basis. They will be invited to support a Secretariat-wide survey of the status of multilingualism, which will be conducted in 2017 by the Coordinator in order to map and analyse challenges and recommend any action necessary.

### Development of a coherent Secretariat-wide approach to multilingualism

12. On 5 May 2016, in response to the General Assembly, which emphasized that multilingualism, as a core value of the Organization, entailed the active involvement and commitment of all stakeholders, the Coordinator presented the requirements for Secretariat-wide multilingualism to the Management Committee. The Coordinator highlighted the collective responsibility of all departments and offices and their relevant heads in mainstreaming multilingualism into their work programmes and activities, in particular in the field of information and communications. The Coordinator also presented the concerns expressed by Member States, including with regard to human resources and procurement policies, disparities between languages on United Nations websites and accountability mechanisms to advance multilingualism. The Coordinator described the assistance that the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management could provide to Secretariat entities, including sharing computer-assisted translation tools, offering technical

[1] Supplementary information available from: www.un.org/Depts/DGACM/multilingualism.shtml.

training to staff whose functions include language-related competencies, developing standardized quality control guidelines and providing expertise on language-related and translation management matters.

13. During that meeting, the Management Committee decided to do the following: (a) endorse the way forward on multilingualism and encourage all heads of departments and offices to mainstream the multilingualism requirements into the workplans of their relevant entities; (b) request that the Coordinator update the Management Committee periodically on progress made in the implementation of such mandates; (c) request that the Coordinator take the lead in developing a coherent policy framework to be formalized in a bulletin of the Secretary-General to guide the action of all Secretariat entities; (d) endorse the use of the guidelines on multilingualism of the Department of Public Information; (e) request that the Office of Human Resources Management review how language skills are assessed during the staff selection process, especially in field missions; and (f) request that all departments and offices identify measures and best practices to be taken, within resource limitations, in the short, medium and long term to strengthen and facilitate the implementation of multilingualism.

14. Encouraged by the support expressed by the Secretariat leadership, the Coordinator is currently formulating a Secretariat-wide policy framework that will provide guidance to all Secretariat entities when implementing multilingualism mandates. It will focus on four areas: raising the awareness of all stakeholders; mainstreaming multilingualism into the policies and activities of the Secretariat; monitoring and evaluating progress and impact; and building knowledge. It will also outline the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders, including the Coordinator.

**Priorities**

15. The priorities of the Coordinator are to develop working relationships with all stakeholders, covering all language groups, provide support to intergovernmental bodies under relevant agenda items of the General Assembly and make recommendations to the Secretary-General on mainstreaming multilingualism, as a core value of the Organization, into the activities of the Secretariat.

**Programme of work for the biennium 2017-2018**

16. The Coordinator will undertake the following activities:

(a) Bring multilingualism to the attention of the management of the Secretariat on a regular basis;

(b) Research linguistic policies and practices in other United Nations entities or international organizations;

(c) Develop a coherent policy framework on multilingualism to guide the Secretariat in implementing the relevant mandates;

(d) Draft and update a comprehensive action matrix;

(e) Develop data-collection tools to assist in reviewing the status of the implementation of the relevant mandates;

(f) Meet and consult periodically with the network of focal points;

(g) Support Language Days and related events and assess stakeholder interest in establishing a "multilingualism week";

(h) Take advantage of, among others, the Saint Jerome Translation Contest, the universities that have signed a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations on cooperation in training of candidates for competitive language examinations and the International Annual Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications in order to raise awareness of multilingualism;

(i) Oversee the drafting of the report of the Secretary-General on multilingualism, conduct consultations as needed and present recommendations to the management of the Secretariat.

## C. Outreach to Member States and other stakeholders

17. The outreach strategy being pursued includes strengthening the partnership with the following: (a) Member States, including large groups, such as the group of francophone ambassadors and the Group of Friends of Spanish at the United Nations; and (b) entities of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations based on a shared language, including through such mechanisms as the International Annual Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications.

18. The ongoing dialogue initiated with Member States and other interested parties contributes to assessing the level of satisfaction of Member States and other clients regarding the implementation of multilingualism.

19. To encourage a coordinated approach to multilingualism, best practices were exchanged through meetings with the Secretary of the High-level Committee on Management of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination and with members of the International Annual Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications.

20. Under the leadership of the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management in her capacity as Chair of the International Annual Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications, the Vienna Statement on multilingualism[2] was adopted on 22 June 2016 by 130 representatives of 60 international organizations. In the statement, the heads of language and conference services of member organizations of the International Annual Meeting recognized that, among other things, multilingualism is a core value of international organizations. In the statement, the member organizations also recalled General Assembly resolution 50/11, in which the Assembly noted that multilingualism is the corollary to the universality of the United Nations and entailed for each Member State, irrespective of the official language in which it expresses itself, the right and the duty to make itself understood and to understand others. In the statement, the member organizations resolved to bring multilingualism to the forefront of their relevant agendas through, among other things, operational guidelines for its

[2] Available from: www.iamladp.org.

implementation. They also resolved to increase efforts to share best practices and creative solutions to support the mainstreaming of multilingualism.

21. Such contact with various stakeholders, including civil society organizations, contributes to identifying common challenges throughout the Secretariat. It also contributes to obtaining support for the promotion of language-related events, including Language Days at the United Nations. In this regard, the Coordinator will provide guidance for the Language Days, including a clear delineation of responsibilities, to assist the efforts conducted by all Secretariat entities in seeking support from external partners.

# III. Contribution of departments and offices to integrating multilingualism into the Secretariat

## A. Management

### Integrating multilingualism into the Secretariat

22. Several departments and offices have highlighted the interconnection between multilingualism and their relevant mandates or areas of responsibility. Notwithstanding the recognized contribution of multilingualism to achieving the mandates of the United Nations, however, few compacts of heads of departments and offices have integrated the multilingualism requirements. While all such compacts include a common objective regarding the timely issuance of documentation, no mention is made of simultaneous distribution in the six official languages. Only 3 of 33 compacts, namely, the heads of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Department of Public of Information and the United Nations Office at Geneva, explicitly mention languages, and only the Department of Public Information and the United Nations Office at Geneva refer directly to multilingualism. When such compacts have reflected the language factor, multilingualism has been consistently mainstreamed into the activities of their relevant entities.

23. **Clearer accountability mechanisms will be proposed to support the mainstreaming of multilingualism into the activities of the Secretariat, in accordance with General Assembly mandates.**

24. Of the 38 proposed strategic framework documents for the biennium 2018-2019,[3] which translate existing mandates into concrete objectives, expected accomplishments and indicators of achievement, only 3 mention either languages or multilingualism.[4]

25. **To effectively mainstream multilingualism throughout the Secretariat, all departments and offices will be encouraged to better reflect the multilingualism requirements in their relevant proposed strategic frameworks.**

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[3] Available from: www.un.org/en/ga/cpc/56/docs56.SHTML.

[4] Programme 1: General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and conference management (A/71/6 (Prog. 1)), Programme 24: public information (A/71/6 (Prog. 24)) and Programme 25: management and support services (A/71/6 (Prog. 25)/Rev. 1).

**Conference management**

26. Innovations in support of language parity and multilingualism have been described in reports of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences and their supplementary information (see A/71/116 and A/70/122). As requested in General Assembly resolution 70/305 on the revitalization of its work, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management is reviewing options to make the *Journal of the United Nations* available in the six official languages year-round.

27. Many other departments and offices are engaged, to various degrees, in translation activities, given that unofficial publications and website content have, in general, not been translated by the conference services of the Secretariat. These translations have been performed by individuals from various backgrounds, ranging from qualified freelance translators to United Nations staff members, United Nations Volunteers, interns and students who are not professional linguists. Many departments and offices have therefore demonstrated an interest in computer-assisted translation software as a tool for attaining greater parity in the six official languages.

28. **The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management will lead the effort in the Secretariat to improve consistency in language-related matters by providing policy guidance, as needed, to all Secretariat entities, including regional commissions. Where required, the Department will, on a cost-recovery basis, offer its proprietary computer-assisted translation software and train staff from other Secretariat entities.**

**Human resources management**

*Policies*

29. The Department of Management has a key role to play in implementing multilingualism throughout the Secretariat and maintaining the equality of its working languages in conformity with the relevant General Assembly resolutions, including those on human resources management.

30. In support of those efforts, the Office of Human Resources Management produced a factsheet in French containing tips on how to apply for jobs in Inspira.[5] It also launched its HR Portal, which provides Secretariat staff with relevant, up-to-date online information on human resources in English and French and gives access to the Human Resources Handbook, available in the working languages. Enhancements to the HR Portal are currently under way to integrate career and learning information. **The Office will give due regard, throughout this process and when developing new policies, to the principle of equality of the working languages of the Secretariat.**

[5] The factsheet, entitled "Comment postuler depuis inspira", is available from: https://careers.un.org/lbw/attachments/inspira-comment_postuler.pdf. It is based on the 2015 revision of "The applicant's manual: manual for the applicant on the staff selection system (inspira)".

*Recruitment and placement*

31. In the Department of Field Support, which publishes all job openings for civilian positions in English and French,[6] candidates have been given the opportunity to conduct written technical assessments and/or competency-based interviews in English or French. Occupational group managers also have the capacity to review and evaluate applications submitted in English or French.

32. The Department of Field Support initiated language-specific rosters to respond to the demand for rapid deployment in peace missions. It is also developing an information management tool to better determine language requirements in the context of staffing needs, including for start-up missions in Arabic-speaking and Spanish-speaking countries.

33. In support of such efforts, the Department of Field Support produced various informational materials in English and French, some of which are also available in Spanish.

34. In recognition of the current needs of the Organization, the flagship senior women talent pipeline initiative of the Department of Field Support to achieve gender equality in senior management in peace missions focused on language skills. Outreach visits were conducted to Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Jordan, Mali, Senegal and Tunisia and the headquarters of the International Organization of la Francophonie. Of the 150 current members of the initiative, 111 speak English in combination with Arabic, French or Spanish.

35. In the Department of Political Affairs, which regards its staff's language skills as critical to maintaining a broad coverage of political developments, language requirements for desk officers are established on the basis of the relevant units' needs and the geographical area of coverage. Language skills are assessed during the interview and the written test.

36. For mediation purposes, the Department of Political Affairs pays close attention to language skills. Experts with proficiency in Arabic or French have consistently been encouraged to apply to the Standby Team of Senior Mediation Advisers and the mediation roster.

37. In the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which is expanding its presence in the field and receives communications from Member States and States parties in a wide range of languages, greater attention has been given to multilingualism in staff selection and placement.

38. In the Office of Legal Affairs, fluency in English and French and, in some cases, Arabic, Russian or Spanish is often listed as a requirement in job openings, in particular for positions in the legal or publication areas, where multilingual proofreading abilities are needed.

39. In the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services, strict language requirements in job announcements and thorough language assessments throughout the staff selection process have been enforced for vacancies in specific

[6] Job openings for local staff positions are, however, published in English only and, occasionally, another language, where needed.

regions in order to continue to discharge the relevant mandates in the six official languages.

40. In the Human Resources Management Service of the United Nations Office at Geneva, staff members are required to have a good command of both English and French to be capable of assessing applications, participating in outreach activities and communicating effectively with staff.

41. In the field offices of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in which official languages other than English are spoken, fluency in more than one United Nations language is usually a requirement. The interview panel may ask questions in any language for which fluency is required. When particular language skills are considered desirable, they serve as criteria to elevate applicants from the long to the short list.

42. At the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), job openings often require or encourage fluency in languages other than English, generally French and/or Russian, owing to the nature of the work and the composition of the Commission.

43. At the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), all staff members in the Professional category and most of the local staff are required to be fluent in English and Spanish.[7] All job openings for Professional staff are published in English, French and Spanish. The Commission's multilingualism efforts are directed towards making more content available in English and, to some extent, French and Portuguese.

44. At the Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA), multilingualism is regarded as supporting other competencies, such as communication, judgment or decision-making, planning and organizing and creativity. The Commission publishes its job openings in English and French and, at times, Arabic and gives due consideration throughout the selection process to candidates with fluency in three or, at least, two official United Nations languages. Subsequently, the majority of the staff of ESCWA is bilingual, if not trilingual.

45. **In the light of the decision of the Management Committee to review how language skills are assessed during the selection process, the Coordinator will be invited to support the Office of Human Resources Management, in particular by sharing best practices and lessons learned from similar organizational settings.**

46. **The Coordinator will need to support a knowledge-based approach to the workforce's language skills, with a view to implementing the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 69/324, in which the Assembly, among other things, invited the Secretary-General to take into account applicable language skills in relation to the mobility framework.**

47. **To reduce linguistic imbalances and respect the equality of the working languages of the Secretariat, the Coordinator will work to raise awareness of the importance of ensuring that job openings specify the need for either of the working languages of the Secretariat, unless the functions of the post require a**

[7] In the subregional headquarters for the Caribbean, where English is more prevalent, a lower proficiency of Spanish is accepted.

**specific working language, as consistently requested by the General Assembly in its successive resolutions on human resources management, including resolution 71/263.**

48. **Recalling that the interaction of the United Nations with the local population in the field is essential and that language skills constitute an important element of the selection and training processes, as reaffirmed in General Assembly resolution 71/263, the Coordinator will pursue efforts to ensure that a good command of the official language(s) spoken in the country of residence is taken into account as an additional asset during those processes.**

49. **At the same time, the Coordinator will work with relevant Secretariat entities, including the Office of Human Resources Management and the Department of Field Support, to assist in the development of guidelines supporting hiring managers, without prejudice to their prerogatives, in setting language requirements in job openings that meet the needs of the Organization, while respecting the principle of language parity and all other applicable mandates, rules and regulations, as appropriate.**

*Training*

50. The Department of Management contributed to mainstreaming multilingualism by supporting language learning throughout the Secretariat. In recognition of the importance of multilingualism in the workforce of the Secretariat, the Department has spearheaded the establishment of the United Nations Learning Centre for Multilingualism and Career Development. The centre is home to the Language and Communication Programme.

51. To better suit the needs of field missions, as requested by the General Assembly, the Language and Communications Programme has created a language-learning services unit to support language-learning needs in the field by providing catalogues of tools and training products, guidelines to ensure harmonization across language training programmes and advisory services to human resources professionals in the field. The Programme also provides training to field staff, supported by peacekeeping missions, to enhance their writing and communications skills in English and French.

52. To achieve parity in the six official languages, the Office of Human Resources Management has worked on standardizing the Language Proficiency Examination to certify the same level of proficiency in all those languages.

53. **Given that language incentives for the Professional and higher categories, which were previously triggered by the successful completion of the Language Proficiency Examination, have been terminated in compliance with General Assembly resolution 70/244, the Coordinator will need to spur creative measures, in coordination with all relevant stakeholders, to continue to encourage linguistic balance in the Organization.**

54. Multilingualism has also been mainstreamed into substantive training in some departments and offices.

55. In the Office of Legal Affairs, multilingualism has been mainstreamed into its training on treaty law and practice, which is offered on a regular basis in both English and French.

56. The Department of Field Support has made its training and guidance materials available in multiple languages. Of the 19 such materials maintained by its Integrated Training Service, 8 are multilingual. In addition to providing materials in several languages, the Department has conducted training sessions in English, French and Spanish in accordance with the trainees' language requirements. All francophone field missions deliver their mandatory induction training to all staff in French.

57. In OHCHR, training for field offices has been organized in languages other than English on a regular basis.

58. The regional offices of the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services have conducted surveys and conflict competence and related workshops with content in Arabic, English, French or Spanish, as appropriate, on the basis of the needs of participants. The Office strives to provide training materials in languages that are suitable to the target audience. Its ultimate goal is to ensure that all staff members have equal access to its services, with a view to creating a harmonious workplace. It is exploring ways in which to have all its outreach materials available in the six official languages.

**Procurement**

59. In view of the requirement of fairness and transparency, the Procurement Division in the Office of Central Support Services of the Department of Management has made the United Nations Global Marketplace, the common procurement web portal of the United Nations system, available in English, French and Spanish.[8] In the same spirit, the Division has made its flagship Procurement Manual and other important legal documents available in English, French and Spanish.[9] In addition, the Department has published the booklet entitled "Doing business with the United Nations Secretariat" in the six official languages in an effort to attract the interest of the private sector.

60. The Procurement Division has designated dedicated staff members, one per official language, to assist and support vendors in the target language throughout the registration process, as needed.[10] During the reporting period and at the request of Member States, the Division conducted informational meetings in Chinese, English and Russian. Its counterparts in field missions have similarly offered training sessions in the national language of the host country, where it is an official language of the United Nations.

61. While the United Nations Office at Vienna strictly applies the policies of the Procurement Division, its location in a German-speaking environment resulted in

[8] The United Nations Global Marketplace is also available in Portuguese, at the request of and with the support of the Pan American Health Organization.

[9] The Procurement Manual is available from: www.un.org/Depts/ptd/about-us/procurement-manual.

[10] The list of support staff per language is available from: www.un.org/Depts/ptd/vendors/vendor-registration-0.

more attention being given to facilitating vendors' understanding of and interest in doing business with the United Nations. UNODC field offices have taken the initiative in drafting terms of reference, statements of work and other procurement documents in the local language in order to enhance competition.[11]

**Knowledge management**

62. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management measured user satisfaction with its services through multiple channels, including through an annual electronic survey on conferences services available in the six official languages and language-specific informational meetings with Member States (see A/71/116, section VII).

63. In addition, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management strengthened best practices and lessons learned through its role in the International Annual Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications.

64. **Overall, most departments and offices reported difficulties in compiling input for the present report owing to the lack of disaggregated data by language, including in human resources management.**

## B. Information and communications

**Publications and library services**

65. The Department of Public Information launched its new e-commerce platform, Shop.UN.org, in the six official languages, with publications for sale in additional languages. In addition, the Department steered efforts to license the translation of many flagship publications.

66. The Department of Public Information also launched the "UN iLibrary", the first comprehensive digital platform for the global search of content created by the United Nations, accessible free of charge for viewing, sharing and embedding. The platform, which includes many multilingual resources, is currently available in English, French and Japanese. Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Spanish versions are scheduled for 2017, pending technical platform capabilities.

67. The United Nations Headquarters Library continued to develop various multilingual tools and services. It also collaborated with the library at the United Nations Office at Geneva to digitize the multilingual archives of the Organization.

68. The Department of Public Information continued to publish reference materials, such as the Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council and various mediation guides, in the six official languages.

69. The Office of Legal Affairs published and maintained multilingual resources, such as treaty series, with documents in 150 languages. The various divisions of the Office also produced resources in various languages. In addition, the United Nations

[11] In general, the policy that applies is that all United Nations offices will take into account the local language in procurement documents if doing so is required to enhance competition.

Commission on International Trade Law maintains a multilingual case law database and a law library.

**Audiovisual services**

70. New or renewed partnerships were developed by the Department of Public Information to expand the reach of its radio and television programmes.

71. During the main part of the seventy-first session of the General Assembly, the Department of Public Information expanded its offering of on-demand webcast videos in the six official languages to all plenary meetings of the Assembly, including the general debate, and public meetings of the Security Council. It will continue to provide such services.

**Meetings coverage**

72. The Department of Public Information continued to provide timely, accurate and comprehensive coverage of all open intergovernmental meetings and select press conferences at Headquarters and other locations in English and French, as mandated and budgeted by the General Assembly.

**United Nations information centres**

73. In 2016, the network of United Nations information centres continued to work daily in Arabic, English, French, Russian and Spanish, as well as in 53 additional local languages. It played a key role in attracting interest in all major events and activities of the United Nations, including sustainable development, climate change, refugees and migrants and the appointment of the new Secretary-General.

**Websites, social media and applications**

74. The Department of Public Information developed minimum standards for multilingualism of United Nations websites.[12] It also provided detailed guidelines and technical considerations to be taken into account when developing or maintaining websites. It currently owns, manages or supports 195 websites under the main United Nations domain name,[1] of which 178 are available in the six official languages. Some offices, such as the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services, are committed to maintaining language parity by updating all versions simultaneously.

75. Departments and offices with a strong field presence, such as the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Field Support, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, OHCHR and UNODC, significantly expanded their multilingual presence on websites and/or social media[1] in an effort to reach out to the widest possible audiences. Other Secretariat entities, such as the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Office for Disarmament Affairs, the United Nations Office at Geneva, the United Nations Office at Vienna and the regional commissions, were also instrumental in producing and developing online content in various languages. A streamlined web

[12] Available from: www.un.org/en/sections/web-governance/minimum-standards-multilingualism-united-nations-websites/index.html.

presence also helped some Secretariat entities to ensure greater consistency across languages. ECLAC is currently integrating its many websites and web pages into fewer platforms.

76. In order to assist in the translation of United Nations websites, the Department of Public Information developed partnerships with the Minsk State Linguistic University in Belarus and Shanghai Normal University in China.

77. Many applications for mobile devices developed by Secretariat entities were made available in several languages. Those included the United Nations audio channels application, which allows users to listen live to United Nations meetings and gain access to audio content from the United Nations News Centre, and to the United Nations news reader application, which features feeds of United Nations news. **The Department of Public Information will mainstream multilingualism into the guidelines for producing applications that it is finalizing in the context of its working group on information and communications technology.**

78. The use of social media has proved to be an efficient way of disseminating original content in multiple languages, with a view to engaging various linguistic audiences, without constantly resorting to translation.

79. **When updating its social media guidelines, the Department of Public Information will add information regarding multilingualism. It will also mainstream multilingualism into the forthcoming Secretariat-wide institutional social media policy.**

## C. Outreach

### Educational outreach

80. To raise awareness of international days, the Department of Public Information developed, enhanced and maintained many multilingual websites. Promotional materials were developed by the Department and the network of United Nations information centres as part of United Nations commemorative programmes. It collaborated with the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management to provide appealing graphic designs in the six official languages.

81. In 2016, for the third edition of the "Many languages, one world" essay contest hosted by the Department of Public Information in partnership with a private institution, ELS Educational Services, 3,600 entries were received from 165 countries and 2,500 universities. A total of 60 winners were selected, 10 per official language, reflecting the principle of language parity.

### Succession-planning outreach

82. In support of the succession-planning efforts of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, a new website dedicated to United Nations language careers[13] was launched, with content available in the six official languages. Various social media platforms were established to raise awareness of

[13] https://languagecareers.un.org/.

language career opportunities at the United Nations throughout duty stations, languages and occupational groups.

83. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management consolidated the network of universities that had signed a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations on cooperation in training of candidates for competitive language examinations. It now comprises 23 higher education institutions from all regions and covers the six official languages.[1]

84. Similarly, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), which directs its efforts towards making more content available in Russian, has developed a partnership with specialized institutions that aims at enhancing the translation and interpretation skills of Russian language professionals.

85. Such multipronged efforts, combining dynamic outreach, communications and training policies, have yielded a large number of qualified applicants for internships, traineeships, regular job vacancies and the competitive language examinations from a wider geographical basis. It is expected that such efforts will significantly increase the pool of qualified translators and interpreters available for the work in various duty stations.

86. The fifth conference of universities that have signed the memorandum of understanding with the United Nations on cooperation in training of candidates for competitive language examinations, to be held at United Nations Headquarters in April 2017, will contribute to meeting the long-term multilingual needs of the Organization by overcoming succession-planning challenges.

## D. Challenges and innovative approaches reported by departments and offices

### Raising awareness

87. ECE is preparing to add a dedicated page on its website, with a link to all relevant resources, in an effort to raise awareness of the multilingualism mandate and its importance to the realization of the goals of the United Nations.

**88. All United Nations offices not at Headquarters will be encouraged to have a dedicated web page on multilingualism on their relevant websites, in view of the cross-cutting nature of and the importance that the General Assembly attaches to multilingualism as a core value of the Organization. The Coordinator will be invited to provide guidance by compiling relevant resources, lessons learned, best practices and other key documents on iSeek, the Secretariat's intranet, in addition to its departmental website.**

### Overcoming the obstacles to quality translations in communications products

89. The Office of Legal Affairs noted that the implementation of multilingualism throughout its divisions and sections varied considerably, with some mentioning obstacles, such as a lack of resources, including staff with adequate language skills, while others pointed to the uneven quality of outsourced translation services.

90. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs relied on partnerships with its country and regional offices, as well as with United Nations Volunteers, to offer products in multiple languages as part of its mobilization campaign ahead of the World Humanitarian Summit, held in Istanbul, Turkey, in May 2016.

91. **Several departments and offices expressed an interest in receiving guidance from the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, as the lead department in documentation management, to benefit from its expertise in terms of translation outsourcing, quality and productivity standards and quality control. Further cooperation will be encouraged in this regard, on a cost-recovery basis where needed, to increase consistency and generate efficiency gains.** In this regard, in November 2016, the United Nations Information Centre in Moscow, in partnership with the Department, held the seventh annual workshop with regional universities that had signed the memorandum of understanding with the United Nations on cooperation in training of candidates for competitive language examinations.

92. OHCHR established new positions of web assistants in Arabic, French and Spanish in duty stations away from headquarters to cope with the amount of web translations and assist in the promotion of web content in various languages on social media.

93. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs is considering the use of computer-assisted translation tools to offer content in additional languages. Another option proposed by the Department would be to pool multilingual staff who could volunteer to engage in activities, such as web translation, requiring specific language skills.

94. **The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management will offer, from within existing resources, to train staff from other departments and offices on the use of computer-assisted translation tools.**

95. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs is increasingly using visual and multimedia material to promote messaging, such as videos and infographics, that require less language content and, therefore, less translation.

96. **When updating its social media guidelines and developing materials for use by United Nations social media managers in the Secretariat, the Department of Public Information will be invited to include recommendations aimed at mainstreaming multilingualism, including by providing practical tips to reduce the content for translation.**

### Nurturing a multilingual workforce

97. The Ethics Office has relied on the language skills of its staff, interns and consultants to communicate and prepare documentation in several languages and mainstream multilingualism into its activities, while making the best use of its resources.

98. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs suggested developing a roster of trainers, searchable by language of instruction, which would make training in a wider range of languages feasible, with beneficial spillover effects in the long term.

99. Along the same lines, when conducting outreach activities, the Office of Administration of Justice selected staff members whose language skills corresponded to the working language(s) at the receiving office.

100. **All Secretariat entities will be invited to build an inventory of staff language skills in order to overcome the obstacle posed by the need for quality translation by providing, for example, the original content in various languages. Such an inventory will prove useful in identifying staff with the adequate language combinations to carry out oral communication engagements, such as training or outreach, in a variety of languages.**

101. OHCHR is increasingly giving priority to the selection of staff fluent in as many official languages of the United Nations as possible.

102. Similarly, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is considering giving more attention at the recruitment stage to language skills, including fluency in more than one of the six official languages, a practice established in other like-minded United Nations entities, such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which requires fluency in at least two of the six official languages owing to the nature of its work.

103. In terms of staff development, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs suggested mainstreaming language training as a component of its core curriculum at Headquarters and offsite, which would also have a positive impact on the Office's staff language proficiency.

104. The Department for Economic and Social Affairs recommended several avenues, which will require further consultations with the Department of Management, to mainstream multilingualism into its activities, such as requiring fluency in more than one language in some job functions, rewarding language learning through annual staff performance evaluations or linking career development to language proficiency.

105. **All Secretariat entities will be invited to give due regard to language requirements during post classifications. In an Organization in which multilingualism is recognized as a core value, efforts shall be made towards a multilingual workforce, with a view to making its staff more mobile, dynamic and flexible.**

106. **All Secretariat entities should encourage staff to benefit from language training programmes offered at Headquarters, all the main duty stations and in the field, including remotely. Given that language incentives for the Professional and higher categories have been terminated, alternative incentives should be promoted. Rewarding language learning through annual staff performance evaluations or linking career development to language proficiency, in strict compliance with the Staff Regulations of the United Nations and Staff Rules, as suggested by some departments and offices, would contribute to nurturing a favourable environment.**

107. Given its location in a multilingual environment, the United Nations Office at Geneva has continuously promoted language learning and supported a wide language training catalogue. However, demand for language training has exceeded its current capacity, thereby jeopardizing its ability to expand this programme.

108. **With a growing demand for language learning, responsible Secretariat entities shall consider diversifying further their language learning programmes to make the best use of the resources available, while giving due regard to continuously assessing the impact of in-person, blended and remote language learning on language proficiency.**

109. The United Nations Office at Vienna has encouraged its staff to take advantage of its language learning programmes in the six official languages, as well as in German, while opening its programme to staff of other international organizations in Vienna, with a view to generating income and ensuring the sustainability of the programme in the longer run.

110. ESCWA has developed partnerships with academic institutes in Beirut to offer language courses in Arabic, English, French and Spanish.

111. **Creative partnerships to expand the language learning programmes of the Secretariat will continue to be pursued.**

**Developing innovative approaches**

112. The Department of Field Support noted challenges that it had faced in its efforts to achieve language parity in its training and guidance materials because of the lack of dedicated resources in the current budget allocation and the need to provide updates on a regular basis after their initial issuance. Voluntary contributions from Member States were sought. Belgium recently offered a contribution of $486,000 to support the training of French-speaking peacekeepers.

113. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs suggested setting aside a small share of the resources available for translation purposes, which would contribute to providing information consistently in the six official languages, as well as in local languages, where appropriate.

114. OHCHR reported receiving occasional voluntary contributions to translate some publications.

115. **All Secretariat entities relying on extrabudgetary resources will be invited to consider including multilingualism, as a core value of the Organization, in their operating costs. The Secretariat will also welcome voluntary contributions from Member States and other stakeholders to meet specific needs.**

116. Regarding procurement documents, it was also noted that some important documents had not yet been translated into the six official languages, posing a challenge to enhancing competition in local environments.

117. **Given that multilingualism contributes to enhancing competition, due regard shall be given to providing multilingual procurement materials.**

118. The Procurement Division has faced challenges when seeking data relating to the language of instruction of training sessions delivered to prospective vendors and other stakeholders worldwide.

119. **The Secretariat will ensure that the language of instruction of future training sessions is properly recorded, regardless of where such training is conducted.**

120. **As a general rule, the Coordinator will need to develop a template for collecting data disaggregated by applicable language about the work of the Secretariat and will support efforts to transition at a later stage to an interactive data collection system to better inform intergovernmental bodies about the progress and impact of its multilingual activities.**

# IV. Recommendations

121. **The Secretariat recommends that the General Assembly:**

(a) **Take note of the present report;**

(b) **Endorse the terms of reference presented in annex II to the report;**

(c) **Support the way forward presented by the Secretary-General in the report to mainstream multilingualism, as a core value of the Organization, into the activities of the Secretariat, using existing resources, on an equitable basis and in compliance with existing mandates.**

# Annex I

## Resolutions of the General Assembly and provisions relevant to multilingualism

71/263 on human resources management (and previous related resolutions)

71/262 on the pattern of conferences (and previous related resolutions)

71/101 A and B on questions relating to information (and previous related resolutions)

70/305 on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly (and previous related resolutions)

70/268 on the comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects (and previous related resolutions)

70/244 on the United Nations common system: report of the International Civil Service Commission

69/324 on multilingualism (and previous related resolutions)

69/270 on cooperation between the United Nations and the International Organization of la Francophonie (and previous related resolutions)

68/268 on strengthening and enhancing the effective functioning of the human rights treaty body system

3190 (XXVIII) on the inclusion of Arabic among the official and the working languages of the General Assembly and its Main Committees

3189 (XXVIII) on the inclusion of Chinese among the working languages of the General Assembly and the Security Council

2480 B (XXIII) on the composition of the Secretariat

2479 (XXIII) on the inclusion of Russian among the working languages of the General Assembly (amendment to rule 51 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly) and question of including Russian and Spanish among the working languages of the Security Council

262 (III) on amendments to the rules of procedure of the General Assembly

2 (I) on rules of procedure concerning languages

Rules of procedures of the General Assembly

Rules of procedures of the Economic and Social Council

Provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council

Article 101.3 of the Charter of the United Nations

# Annex II

## Proposed terms of reference for the Coordinator for Multilingualism

### General

The Coordinator for Multilingualism will have the following responsibilities:

(a) Act as an entry point for concerns and queries from Member States and Secretariat entities;

(b) Serve as a facilitator to attain a coordinated, consistent and coherent approach in the Secretariat to multilingualism and, at the request of the Secretary-General, at the United Nations system level through the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination;

(c) Inspire all departments and offices by initiating and suggesting innovative solutions to foster an organizational culture conducive to multilingualism.

### Key responsibilities and tasks

*Act as an entry point for concerns and queries from Member States and Secretariat entities*

Under this responsibility, the Coordinator will:

(a) Centralize proposals and requests relating to multilingualism throughout the Secretariat;

(b) Assist, as needed, in conducting assessments of the challenges relating to multilingualism in the Secretariat, including in the area of public information and communications;

(c) Address the issue of multilingualism, as a core value of the Organization, in meetings with senior managers, with a view to raising awareness of applicable mandates;

(d) Address the issue of multilingualism with Member States and other stakeholders, such as international organizations and large groups of Member States that promote a shared language;

(e) Take advantage of meetings with universities that have signed the memorandum of understanding with the United Nations on cooperation in training of candidates for competitive language examinations and conference services of partner organizations to address multilingualism;

(f) Participate in events to celebrate or promote multilingualism, including those organized by United Nations system entities, Member States or other stakeholders, at the request of the organizers.

*Serve as a facilitator to attain a coordinated, consistent and coherent approach in the Secretariat to multilingualism and, at the request of the Secretary-General, at the United Nations system level through the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination*

Under this responsibility, the Coordinator will:

(a) Continue to develop the network of focal points that supports the Coordinator in effectively and consistently implementing relevant resolutions throughout the Secretariat by:

(i) Thoroughly building an inventory of mandates relating to multilingualism, including, where applicable, responsible parties and relevant timelines, for dissemination within the network of focal points;

(ii) Encouraging the designation of focal points for multilingualism in every department and office and maintaining and updating the database of focal points throughout the Secretariat;

(iii) Drafting and periodically updating the terms of reference of the focal points for multilingualism;

(iv) Convening periodic meetings of focal points and drafting and circulating meeting reports and following up on decisions;

(v) Systematically collecting information from focal points to build knowledge of the overall implementation of multilingualism;

(vi) Coordinating and compiling input from Secretariat entities for the report of the Secretary-General on multilingualism, in accordance with resolutions of the General Assembly;

(vii) Identifying areas for inter-departmental cooperation, including in conference management and documentation, to enhance multilingualism;

(b) At the request of the Secretary-General, coordinate joint measures with the secretariat of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination to support a comprehensive and coordinated approach on multilingualism within the United Nations system, taking into consideration the relevant recommendations contained in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on multilingualism (JIU/REP/2011/4);

(c) Exchange information with the conference services of relevant Secretariat and United Nations entities, as well as other international organizations, to build comparative knowledge of the implementation of multilingualism.

*Inspire all departments and offices by initiating and suggesting innovative solutions to foster an organizational culture conducive to multilingualism*

Under this responsibility, the Coordinator will:

(a) Compile and disseminate best practices and lessons learned about the implementation of multilingualism on the basis of input received from Secretariat entities and information collected from other United Nations entities or international organizations;

(b) Encourage innovative approaches throughout the Secretariat in support of multilingualism as a core value of the Organization, including, among other things, by nurturing its multilingual workforce as a cost-effective measure to implement multilingualism;

(c) Provide advice and guidance, as needed, to all Secretariat entities on language-related policies;

(d) As head of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, offer to provide guidance and share knowledge and expertise in all conference management-related matters with other Secretariat entities, including by offering training sessions by DGACM staff;

(e) Advise the Secretary-General on encouraging a systematic Secretariat-wide approach to mainstreaming multilingualism, including by proposing to update or complement, where needed, existing bulletins of the Secretary-General and administrative instructions.

## Working modalities

In its resolution 70/9, the General Assembly emphasized that multilingualism, as a core value of the Organization, entails the active involvement and commitment of all stakeholders, including all United Nations duty stations and offices away from Headquarters. In its resolution 69/324, the Assembly called upon all departments and offices within the Secretariat to fully support the work of the Coordinator in the implementation of relevant mandates on multilingualism.

Subsequently, the Coordinator will rely on the active participation of the focal points in the activities aimed at fulfilling the mandated responsibilities. The Coordinator is currently supported by a focal point in her office who is assigned with daily interactions at the expert level with members of the network and other stakeholders, as needed, in support of the mandates on multilingualism.

To better coordinate with all departments and offices, including those away from Headquarters, the Coordinator will propose the development of a dedicated web page on iSeek, the intranet of the Secretariat, as well as other collaborative tools, such as a Unite community. The web page will compile relevant resources, including mandates, reports, guidelines, applicable administrative instructions and bulletins of the Secretary-General, reports of relevant meetings and activities, and best practices and lessons learned.

The Coordinator will engage remotely with departments and offices away from Headquarters, at no cost, by using videoconference services. To raise awareness of the importance of multilingualism at the United Nations, the Coordinator will also make presentations on multilingualism readily available to Secretariat staff for delivery in meetings and official travel, as needed.[a]

[a] In this regard, during the annual meeting with regional universities that have signed the memorandum of understanding with the United Nations on cooperation in training of candidates for competitive language examinations and officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, held in November 2016 in collaboration with the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the United Nations Information Centre in Moscow delivered a presentation prepared by the Coordinator.

## Reporting lines

The Coordinator for Multilingualism reports to the Secretary-General and appropriate internal coordination bodies. The Secretary-General reports to the General Assembly on the work of the Coordinator and the implementation of relevant resolutions.

## Anticipated support

In addition to the active involvement and commitment of all stakeholders, including all United Nations duty stations and offices away from Headquarters, the Coordinator will continue to work on best practices with the Department of Public Information and receive its assistance to inform the public about the importance of multilingualism, as specifically requested by the General Assembly in its resolutions 70/9 and 71/101 A and B.

In this regard, it is expected that the Department of Public Information will continue to maintain the websites that are currently under its responsibility, including the websites of the various United Nations Language Days. All other multilingual products issued or maintained by and budgeted to the Department, such as United Nations Radio and United Nations news centres, will continue to be produced by the Department.

Given that multilingualism and a multilingual workforce are closely intertwined, the Coordinator is expected to work closely with those departments and offices that establish and/or implement human resources policies to identify any innovative approach to realize the mandates of the General Assembly.